

LSSM VIDEO CONFERENCING PROJECT SUMMARY

APRIL 9, 2008

The Need

LSSM serves an area approximately 300 miles across from east to west and 150 miles across from north to south containing more than 27,500 total square miles. There are forty-three counties in the service area with a total population of 1,254,189. Of that, 14.8% are classified as poor, making a total of 185,545 potential clients spread out over the service area.

LSSM has forty-two employees located in six offices throughout the service area. There are two offices located in Springfield and one office located in each of the following cities: Cape Girardeau, Charleston, Rolla, and West Plains. Most of these offices serve areas of twelve or more counties with one-way distances to a local office being as far as one hundred miles for clients to travel. Also, there are vast distances between LSSM offices that vary from seventy-five miles to over two hundred and thirty miles. Outside of the City of Springfield, none of the counties where LSSM offices are located have public transportation available to the low-income. This makes it difficult for many potential clients to access LSSM's local offices. Also, when a client needs specialized expertise from an attorney in one of LSSM's other offices, there has not been a cost-effective mechanism for the client to meet face-to-face with a legal aid attorney.

The distances between offices makes it difficult to conduct face-to-face staff meetings and trainings. A great deal of time and resources are consumed when bringing the staff together. This is equally true when trying to establish face-to-face meetings or poverty law training sessions with LSSM's private lawyer, pro bono panel members located throughout the service area. We have estimated that with reimbursement of meals, mileage, hotels and travel time it can cost as much as \$9,350 for a one day face-to-face staff meeting at the main office in Springfield, Missouri.

LSC regulations require the board of directors to meet at least four times per year. The board consists of twenty-two members; who are located across the entire service area. To bring all the board members together in a single location is time consuming and expensive. Sixty percent of the board members are private attorneys. When an attorney has to travel a great distance to attend a meeting, valuable time is lost from their private practice. We have estimated that it can cost as much as \$9,000 in actual dollars and lost private attorney billable time when the board meets at the main office in Springfield, Missouri. This represents a cost of \$36,000 per year for four meetings.

In addressing the communication needs within our organization, we have determined that the current combination of telephone, Internet connection, email, and web browser, meets most of them. However, these technologies do not adequately address the need for face-to-face meetings. Training sessions, staff meetings, and brainstorming sessions are examples most often cited as requiring face-to-face interaction. There are times when we need to have visual aids, such as a white board, computer screen, client data base, or other visual reports to get management messages across to meeting participants. Also, there are times when it helps to see facial and body expressions of the meeting participants.

It is difficult to meet face-to-face with clients because of the vast distances. A face-to-face meeting is very beneficial for a lawyer to meet with and build a rapport with his/her client. By meeting a client face-to-face, a lawyer can determine the demeanor, truthfulness, cooperativeness, and commitment of the client prior to initiating a case or appearing in court.

The Solution

With these needs in mind, LSSM began exploring the possibility of utilizing the existing video conferencing technology available in Missouri. Use of this technology would enable our program to more effectively communicate with staff, private attorney judicare and pro bono panel members, board members and clients.

In the fall of 2003, Fred Hall, attorney, former board member of LSSM, and former President of the University of Missouri System Board of Curators, initiated a meeting with staff from the University of Missouri and LSSM to discuss a partnership with the University of Missouri. The purpose of the partnership would allow LSSM to be able to access, at very low cost, video conferencing resources already in existence through the Missouri Research and Education Network (MOREnet). MOREnet, a part of the University of Missouri System, provides Internet connectivity, technical support, video conferencing services, and training to Missouri's K-12 schools, colleges and universities, public libraries, health care, state government, and other affiliates. MOREnet has the ability to manage video conferencing resources across the entire state of Missouri. Thus, LSSM would have access to a virtual Missouri statewide rural legal services video conferencing network.

The University of Missouri established TeleCommunication Resource Centers (TCRC's) located around the State. In our service area, the TCRCs are located in Salem, Portageville, Park Hills, Reeds Spring, and Nevada. There are additional sites located in rural areas throughout the rest of the state. These sites provide low-cost video conferencing sessions that are fully staffed with people trained to assist individuals or groups wanting to use video conferencing services. Each location has training facilities, staffing, and private rooms for use by partnering agencies.

In 2004, LSSM established the partnership with the University of Missouri to utilize the TCRC sites to hold board meetings; provide substantive law training in association with the University of Missouri Law School, Columbia, The Missouri Bar, University of Missouri, St. Louis University Law School; and the statewide Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (MCADSV).

In April 2007, after extensive discussion in a Board and Staff retreat, LSSM decided to invest in video conferencing hardware in order to link all six legal aid offices together through the partnership with MOREnet. The final phase of this effort was accomplished in January 2008. LSSM now has the use of this existing technology infrastructure as well as the ability to conduct its own office point-to-point video conferences.

2008-2009 Plans

LSSM's overall goal is to utilize the current video conferencing infrastructure to be more cost-effective and efficient in servicing the legal needs of our clients. Every hour and dollar saved means increased services to clients; not to mention increasing the quality of services to clients. We will accomplish this goal by adopting the following strategies.

Increased Attorney & Client Contact

Within the six offices of LSSM, attorneys have varying expertise in specialized areas. When a client in one of the six offices needs to consult with an attorney with specialized expertise in another office, we can schedule a video conference for a face-to-face consultation. This can be done by having a client go to the nearest office or (for a moderate fee to LSSM) a TCRC site. This will save time and money both for the

client and LSSM. Neither the client nor attorney will have to drive great distances to attend such a consultation.

Serving Bilingual Clients

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates there are 19,736 Hispanic residents in the LSSM service area. This population is dispersed across forty-three counties and is rapidly growing. The 2000 population data represents a 140% increase from the 1990 to the 2000 census.

There are groups of Hispanics located in the boothheel area of the state who are engaged in farming cotton, rice and soybeans. There are other pockets of this Hispanics located in the service area employed by poultry operations. A very high percentage of the Hispanic population are qualified for civil legal services. However, because this population is geographically dispersed and presents such a unique language challenge, providing legal services to them is difficult.

LSSM is pursuing hiring a fluent Spanish-speaking paralegal in one of our offices. Thereafter, when an office needs an interpreter, LSSM can provide an interpreter to the other office via video conferencing.

Judicare and Pro Bono Recruitment

Video conferencing will be used to increase outreach and training for volunteer attorneys and to promote judicare and pro bono activities across our service area. Some large law firms in our service area already have video conferencing capabilities. Video conferencing hardware in the legal service offices allows for direct hookup with the large law firms to do pro bono recruitment and/or client consultations in each of the law firm's offices. This practice has already been tried successfully by our program with a large statewide law firm in Missouri. LSSM was able to promote pro bono involvement with attorneys from each of the corporate law firms offices located in four different areas of the State.

Also, when conducting a video conference training session, LSSM will recruit judicare and pro bono panel members by offering free attendance to a training session; if the private attorney will join LSSM's judicare or pro bono panel. The private attorney also receives Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits from The Missouri Bar.

Statewide Legal Services Website

Missouri has completed considerable work on the statewide legal services web site. The web site contains a large amount of pertinent information that is useful to both professionals and clients. Video conferencing allows us the ability to target client groups and professionals and present training sessions on how to use the statewide legal services web site. Targeted outreach, using video conferencing to groups like domestic violence shelters, Area Agencies on Aging, senior citizens centers, and Human Development Corporations across the state allows us to schedule interactive meetings with these groups to teach them how to get the most benefit out of the forms and information contained on the web site.

Board and Committee Meetings

Video conferencing can be used to increase board participation and reduce meeting costs. Client and attorney members can attend meetings at a local LSSM office without losing a day in travel time and lost wages. Costs to the program are greatly reduced and participation increases. These same benefits can be

experienced by holding video conference meetings for State Planning groups such as collaborative committees, developmental directors, technology directors and the various substantive law task forces that meet on a regular basis.

Poverty Law CLE's

The Missouri Bar and University of Missouri Law School have committed to working with the legal services community to develop specialized poverty law continuing legal education directed specifically to professionals working in the legal services field. This training is provided to the legal service offices through the use of video conferencing technology providing legal service attorneys to receive training without having to travel across the state. This is particularly valuable in the rural areas where TCRC's exist. In the future, LSSM is exploring the possibility of locating video conferencing hardware in The Missouri Bar office and at the University of Missouri Law School. This will allow direct access to training functions sponsored by the The Missouri Bar and the Law School. Members of the legal service organizations would be to participate at a reduced cost.

Domestic Violence Shelters

Specialized training for advocates working in domestic violence shelters has been provided in the rural areas of the state through the use of video conferencing. LSSM developed training materials specifically for professionals working with victims of domestic violence. Interactive video conferencing training has been and will continue to be scheduled at TCRC sites across the state to allow as many domestic violence advocates to participate as possible. The training is used to promote information and to review materials and forms already developed and available for clients and professionals on the Missouri Legal Services of Missouri web site.

Local Training Issues

There is always a need for continued staff training within our organization. Training sessions will include computer software, human resources issues, use of Intranet, general program policy and procedure and the Kemps Caseworks for Windows (Prime) client and timekeeping database software. With the advent of the video conferencing system, LSSM conducts these training sessions with staff from all six offices at no additional cost to the program.

Prior to implementation of the video conferencing system, all new employees were required to drive to the Springfield main office for an initial employee orientation. The orientation included: Human Resource forms processing, program policy and procedure training, and Kemps case management training. Having staff drive into the Springfield office costs the program mileage, hotel expenses, and meal, plus lost time in their local office. It is our plan to provide new hires an initial orientation conducted via video conferencing thereby avoiding all these additional costs.

In 2008, LSSM provided the lead role to planning and organizing the Legal Services of Missouri Statewide Conference. LSSM identified and utilized the services of the Missouri State University (MSU) "Go Lead" professional staff to provide training tracks at the conference. LSSM plans to use these services to provide a professional series of training sessions to staff on topics such as human resource, HIPAA, drugs in the workplace, and sexual harassment in the workplace utilizing the in-house video conference system.

Audit and Other Program Monitoring Visits

During the course of the annual audit and during periodic monitoring visits by various funding organizations, it is sometimes necessary for their staff to conduct site visits at LSSM's local offices. It is sometimes necessary for them to conduct interviews of LSSM staff for the purpose of ascertaining LSSM staff's knowledge and application of funding regulations and program policies and procedures. Video conferencing provides the auditor and funding organizations a low-cost alternative to conduct these face-to-face interviews without having to travel to our outer offices.

Future Potential Uses

Other Training Issues

National training could be provided to staff and volunteer attorneys on such issues as housing law, elderly law, and consumer issues. For example, the Missouri Legal Services programs or LSSM could contract for a half-day training session from national housing law experts at a greatly reduced cost. Substantive law experts located in another part of the country could provide training to staff located in Missouri through the use of video conferencing. Missouri programs would save money in travel time, lost work and the cost of bringing national trainers to Missouri. Legal Services volunteer attorneys and partnering agencies could benefit from this resource as well.

Missouri's Migrant Population

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) funds a statewide migrant project in Missouri. Legal Aid of Western Missouri (LAWMO), located in Kansas City, is the recipient of these grant funds. These funds are to be used to provide low-income migrant farmers in the entire state with legal assistance in civil matters.

Missouri's migrant population can be found scattered throughout the state with significant migrant problems in the bootheel area. The bootheel area is located more than 400 hundred miles one-way from the office of the Director of the Migrant Project in Kansas City. Video conferencing would allow the Director to consult clients without leaving the office. This would greatly expand the number of migrant clients in LSSM's service area who could be served by this project.

Housing Law Issues

Legal Services of Eastern Missouri (LSEM) and LSSM recently collaborated on a significant housing law case in the Bootheel area of Missouri. Attorneys from (LSEM) with housing law expertise assisted attorneys in the bootheel area with this litigation. It is over 150 miles one-way between St. Louis and the Bootheel area where the clients reside. Videoconferencing technology would allow for a much more cost efficient use of attorney resources while still allowing clients to meet directly with the attorney on cases in this category.

Missouri National Guard

Southern Missouri, like many other areas of the state, has been affected greatly by the war on terror and the war in Iraq. Reservists from all across our service area are serving their country overseas as part of this effort. Fort Leonard Wood, a large military training facility with hundreds of men and women currently

serving in Iraq, is in our service area.

The Missouri National Guard has extensive video conferencing capabilities. LSSM has the ability to work with key staff of the National Guard to determine if video conferencing might be a resource to serve eligible family members of troops serving in Iraq who are having legal issues as a direct result of their spouses serving in the war.

Plan Evaluation & Documentation

The project will evaluate the following issues:

1. Total number of clients who were able to access legal service resources through the use of video conferencing technology.
2. The cost benefit of using video conferencing technology to serve clients.
3. The number of clients receiving specialized services through video conferencing techniques, i.e., migrants, Spanish speaking, educational needs, etc.
4. The total number of additional clients who were served through outreach activities associated with video conferencing technology
5. The number of legal services staff receiving specialized training through the use of video conferencing technology and the cost benefit of providing training through this technique.
6. Total number of advocates, professional organizations, and individuals receiving training, support or outreach through the use of video conferencing technologies.
7. Cost benefit analysis of the use of video conferencing for staff meetings, task force meetings, state planning activities and board meetings.
8. Impact of the use of video conferencing technology on the development of the judicare and pro bono recruitment and training in our service area.
9. Evaluation and written survey of all participants and professionals to assess efficiency, cost benefits and effectiveness of video conferencing technology.